

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

GRØNLANDS FUGLE. THE BIRDS OF GREENLAND. Part 1. By Finn Salomonsen. Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1950: 9 × 13 in., 158 pp., 17 color-plates and numerous decorative sketches by Gitz-Johansen. Paper. To be published in three parts, each at 60 Dan. kr. (\$8.72), but parts cannot be supplied separately.

This handsome work, which promises to bring us up to date on the birdlife of the world's largest island, possesses to a remarkable degree the charm and rugged beauty of that island. At the beginning of each species writeup the Danish, English and Eskimo bird names are given in large type, together with a little drawing of the bird itself in black and white. The text is presented in two columns, Danish at the left, English at the right. The roughness of the color plates reminds us instantly of wind, cold sea water, and hard ice and rocks. The distributional paragraphs are a kind of symphony of place-names. Some of these all-but-unpronounceable agglutinated words (e.g., Seqineqarajugtoq and Tingmiakulugssuit, the names for certain mountains) will not bewilder students of the Eskimo language, for their etymology is clear enough; but even the initiated—those who recall that Angmagssalik is on the east coast and Upernavik on the west—will long for that "small scale map" which is, according to a statement in the introduction, to appear "at the back of the present book" (i.e., presumably, at the end of Part 3).

The distributional material of Part 1 might well have been shortened, simplified, or summarized. Users of the book will welcome detailed discussion of the areas throughout which a given species is known to breed. They cannot object to what at first seems to be over-use of long local names for cliffs, islands, fjords and tide-rips so long as certain general statements remain perfectly clear. But when, in order to ascertain just how far north and how far south a species breeds they have to resort to underlining they may well object to the obfuscating detail. A few statements are regrettably unclear or unidiomatic—e.g., that pertaining to *Branta bernicla*, a species which "has been recorded a few times as breeding south of its actual nesting-range" (p. 82). Some of the general summaries of species-distribution are not wholly satisfactory either. I know from personal observation that *Branta bernicla hrota* breeds southward as far as Lat. 64°N. on Southampton Island, and Gavin (1948. *Wilson Bulletin*, 59: 198) has reported its breeding in the Perry River district just south of Queen Maud Gulf, yet Salomonsen flatly states that the "pale breasted form (*B. b. hrota*) [is] restricted to Spitzbergen, N. Greenland, N. Ellesmere Island and Axel Heiberg Land" (p. 84).

The distributional data on the whole are excellent and exceedingly timely in view of the fact that the forthcoming Fifth Edition of the A.O.U. Check-List will cover Greenland as well as the Arctic Archipelago. The author makes clear that Leach's Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) is not actually known to nest in Greenland; that the nest of the Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) has yet to be found anywhere on the island; that the Pintail (*Dafila acuta*) breeds in some numbers on the west coast; that the Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) has not actually been found breeding though it occurs with astonishing regularity in spring (adults) and from mid-September to mid-November (young birds); that the Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) breeds "only in the low-arctic region of the West-coast, from 64° to 72° 30' n. lat." (p. 59) and winters "in the British Isles, chiefly in Ireland" (p. 63). Definite statements of this sort have been made possible through banding. One banded Greenland White-fronted Goose has been recovered in December in North America—at Metis Beach along the St. Lawrence River.

Most of the 22 species written up in Part 1 are treated quite fully. The author has had wide experience in the north, but in discussing nesting habits, courtship, molts migration and the

like he has, fortunately, drawn extensively on the experiences and writings of others. His repeated reference to the failure of certain species to breed during adverse summers, notably on the east coast, causes us to wish that this whole subject, as well as the irregularities of the mild periods he has written about elsewhere (1948. *Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidss.*, 42: 85-99), might have been discussed at greater length in the introduction. In many of the life history discussions use of the word 'nocturnal' is unfortunate in that it is almost certain to connote *darkness* to many readers. Students who have observed birds during the breeding season in the far north know full well how little actual darkness there is. The birds come and go, sing, court and feed almost literally at all hours, for the sky is light even in the middle of the night.

Of very special interest are the author's graphic discussion of the cliff-nesting of the Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*); the striking difference between the colonial nesting of the Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) on islets in salt water and the strictly non-colonial nesting of the King Eider (*S. spectabilis*) inland; the remarkable dependence of the Harlequin Duck (*H. histrionicus*) upon swiftly moving water; the migration of Brant across the notorious ice-cap; and the presence of the beaks of certain cephalopods in the stomachs of virtually all specimens of Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) examined. Hagerup's guess was that the Fulmars ingested these cephalopod beaks when eating "the faeces of the smaller whales, which feed on cuttlefish."

The Gitz-Johansen drawings are bold and sketchy to say the least. Their technique is exciting. They are not, primarily, bird illustrations at all, but Greenland landscapes or seascapes in which birds happen to figure. Crude as they are, their plant life, rocks, horizons, and skies are authentic. The most successful of them, possibly, is that of the Fulmar—a brisk study chilly enough to make one reach for one's overcoat. Among the least successful is the flying Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*), which is too small headed, too small footed, too dark in eye-color, and utterly motionless despite its spread wings.—George Miksch Sutton.

DISTRIBUTIONAL CHECK-LIST OF THE BIRDS OF MEXICO. Part 1. By Herbert Friedmann, Ludlow Griscom and Robert T. Moore. Cooper Ornithological Club, Pacific Coast Avifauna, Number 29, Berkeley, California, June 30, 1950: 202 pp., 2 colored plates (used also in *The Condor*). \$4.00.

The authors of this first published list of Mexican birds make it quite clear in their introduction that they expect the work to be out of date just as soon as interested readers have had time to point out overlooked data in the literature and to correct the ranges of various species with which they may be individually familiar. Although a few published records have been overlooked, the big gaps in the ranges of many species are no doubt due to lack of published data. For example, the eastern range of the Rufescent Tinamou (*Crypturellus cinnamomeus*) is given as "southern Tamaulipas south through Central America," whereas the bird ranges northward through western Tamaulipas and eastern Nuevo León at least as far as the hills south of Linares. The Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) is said to be "locally common to June 11" in Baja California, and to occur in certain other Mexican states in winter, whereas actually it is fairly common in several states throughout the summer. Adult and young birds may be observed on prairie lakes in Zacatecas and from the paved highway along the west shore of Lake Chapala, in Jalisco, in June and July. Such large and easily observed birds as the Wood Ibis (*Mycteria americana*) and Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) are not listed for the big state of Oaxaca, although both species are quite common in the marshes around Salina Cruz. Since it is probable that anyone using the book will consider the stated ranges as merely suggestive, these faults may be taken lightly. The thing of importance is that we do now have a published list and that some definite points in the range of each species have been set down. The Check-List is welcome and well worthwhile.